

Washington

Memorial of the Citizens
of the United States -
Praying the purchase of
Mount Vernon by the
Government. 1848



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Book 113

MEMORIAL

OF

CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES,

PRAYING

The purchase of Mount Vernon by the government.

MARCH 10, 1848.

Referred to the Committee for the District of Columbia, and ordered to be printed.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled:

Your memorialists, citizens of the United States, living in the full enjoyment of the priceless liberties mainly achieved by the indefatigable and unrequited services of Washington, respectfully represent that it is their fervent wish and sincere desire to see, without further delay, the requisite appropriation made and the necessary measures taken by your honorable bodies to purchase "one hundred and fifty acres of Mount Vernon, lying between parallel lines and extending from the Potomac river to the Alexandria road, so as to include the buildings, grounds, and tomb" of Washington, agreeably to the terms specified in a letter from John A. Washington, esq., to Hon. G. M. Dallas, Vice President of the United States, Hon. John W. Davis, late Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Hon. Reverdy Johnson, Hon. J. T. Morehead, U. S. Senators, and others, dated at Mount Vernon, December 22, 1846, and naming the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, in United States six per cent. stock, as the satisfaction for which said invaluable premises will be transferred to the general government by the present proprietress, Mrs. Jane C. Washington.

Your memorialists further represent that, in common with their fellow-citizens, they entertain the most profound reverence and veneration for everything connected with the memory of the "Saviour of America;" and that by consummating the aforesaid purchase, the slanderous charge, accusing republics of being invariably ungrateful, will be refuted, and a small instalment made towards liquidating a portion of the debt of gratitude due to his memory from the favored citizens of this country.

They therefore request that action may be promptly taken to carry out and consummate the object set forth in this memorial, that they and their descendants may enjoy the right and privilege of visiting, unrestrictedly, the venerated grounds, mansion, and sepulchre of Washington, which at

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present are liable to the various casualties, uncertainties, and transfers attendant upon all private property in the absence of laws of entailment and primogeniture.

All which is respectfully submitted.

Documents relating to the proposed purchase of Mount Vernon by the citizens of the United States, in order that they may at all times have a legal and indisputable right to visit the grounds, mansion, and tomb of Washington.

The undersigned, aware that the reverence and veneration which leads all citizens passing within its reach to wish to visit the tomb and dwelling of General Washington, renders it to a private proprietor a residence most burdensome; that, at the same time, the public curiosity and interest are of necessity very imperfectly gratified; that as a property, its hereditary possessor is at once forbidden, by every natural and every public feeling, to suffer any dilapidation of the place, and yet cannot keep it as every American would wish to see it, in such condition as Washington left it, without an expense which it cannot reimburse; and unwilling, moreover, that the venerated remains there should be subject to the uncertainties and transfers of individual fortune, are strongly desirous that it should become a national property, dedicated to some noble and fit public purpose. They therefore request its present proprietor to specify in writing the terms on which this nation may become possessed of one hundred or the entire number of acres composing the estate known to the world as the burial-place of Washington.

G. M. DALLAS, Vice President of the United States.

DAVID R. ATCHISON, President of the United States Senate.

JOHN W. DAVIS, Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives.

REVERDY JOHNSON, United States Senator from Maryland.

CHESTER ASHLEY, " " " " Arkansas.

SAM HOUSTON, " " " " Texas.

WM. WOODBRIDGE, " " " " Michigan.

J. T. MOREHEAD, " " " " Kentucky.

WM. UPHAM, " " " " Vermont.

JAS. A. BLACK, United States Representative from South Carolina.

G. W. HOPKINS, " " " " Virginia.

W. W. WOODWORTH, " " " " New York.

JAMES BUCHANAN, United States Secretary of State.

WM. L. MARCY, " " " " War.

GEORGE BANCROFT, " " " " the Navy.

R. J. WALKER, " " " " the Treasury.

EDMUND BURKE, " " Commissioner of Patents.

W. GUNTON, of Washington.

JOHN C. RIVES, of Washington.

LEVI D. SLAMM, of New York.

WM. C. JONES, of New Orleans.

W. W. SEATON, Mayor of Washington.

H. ADDISON, " " Georgetown.

WASHINGTON, August 5, 1846.

MOUNT VERNON, *December 22, 1846.*

To the Hon. G. M. Dallas, J. W. Davis, Reverdy Johnson, James A. Black, David R. Atchison, C. Ashley, G. W. Hopkins, W. W. Woodworth, W. W. Seaton, Sam Houston, W. Upham, W. Woodbridge, J. T. Morehead, W. Gunton, Edmund Burke, John C. Rives, James Buchanan, W. L. Marcy, George Bancroft, R. J. Walker, L. D. Slamm, W. C. Jones, and H. Addison:

GENTLEMEN: A paper signed by you has been presented to me, in which, for the various reasons assigned, you express the desire that Mount Vernon, the former residence and present burial-place of General Washington, should become the property of the United States, to be appropriated to some noble and useful purpose. And you desire to know from the present proprietor on what terms the nation may become possessed of it. As some misapprehension may exist as to who is the present proprietor of the property, it may be as well for me to explain it.

General Washington, in his will, gave Mount Vernon to the late Judge Bushrod Washington, who bequeathed it to my father, John A. Washington, who at his death left it to my mother, Mrs. Jane C. Washington, and empowered her to sell it to the general government of the United States, if the government desired to purchase, and she thought it advisable for the interests of his children to sell it. My mother, Mrs. Jane C. Washington, who is now living, is therefore the present proprietor of Mount Vernon. I delivered your communication to her, and she requested me to say in answer to it, that her long residence at Mount Vernon, the associations connected with the memories of those who formerly lived here, and the fact of its having belonged to the ancestors of her children for nearly two hundred years, all contribute to render the place especially dear to her, and if she consulted her own feelings alone she would not give it up for any inducement that could be offered. But the respectability of the names attached to your communication, many of them of gentlemen connected with the government, and some of whom, being immediate representatives of the people, probably express the wishes of the nation on this subject, have induced her to lay aside, in some measure, her own wishes, and to yield something to what she considers as the voice of the nation expressed through you.

She authorizes me to say that, if Congress thinks proper to make the application, the government can obtain one hundred and fifty acres of Mount Vernon, lying between parallel lines, and extending from the Potomac river to the Alexandria road, so as to include the buildings, grounds, and tomb, upon the following terms:

1. The remains of General Washington, and of every other member of the family now in the family vault at Mount Vernon, shall never be removed from their present resting place.
2. Every member of the Washington family now living, (and no one else,) who may desire it, may be buried there, and shall not be removed afterwards.
3. The government shall never sell, rent, nor give the whole nor any portion of the property that may be conveyed, to any third person.
4. In the event of the dissolution of the existing federal government, the property shall revert to the heirs of John A. Washington, the oldest son of the present proprietor.

5. That the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, in money or United States six per cent. stock, running not less than ten nor more than twenty years, with interest, payable semi annually, shall be paid to Mrs. Jane C. Washington, or to her duly authorized agent, upon the conveyance of the property to the United States.

With great respect, I am, gentlemen, your obedient servant,
JOHN A. WASHINGTON.

For nearly fifty years the descendants of Washington have guarded and watched over his sainted remains; and have gratuitously entertained all who visit the tomb of the Father of his Country. The average number of visitors to those holy grounds is 10,000 per annum, and would be vastly greater were there a good road leading to them, and any houses of public entertainment in their vicinity. In order that the American people may appreciate the reasonableness of the sum at which this invaluable property is now offered to them through their representatives in Congress, it is only necessary to allude to the fact that Washington received no compensation for his eight years' services as commander-in-chief of our armies during the revolutionary war. Nearly every dollar of the national money that passed through his hands was paid out by him to compensate persons in the secret service of our army, acting as spies in the enemy's possessions—the expenses of numerous detachments of picked men employed on secret expeditions, reconnoitring the advance posts of the British—defraying charges incurred for provisions used not only by himself, but by the officers of his staff, most if not all of whom were included in his mess. Travelling and other contingent expenses were all met and paid out of the various amounts received by him from the government, as is shown by his *fac-simile* accounts, the originals of which, with their vouchers, are carefully preserved and kept for public examination, in the office of the Register of the United States Treasury.

At first sight, the sum of \$100,000 for only one hundred and fifty acres of poor land, having nothing of visible importance upon them saving a group of ancient and dilapidated buildings, with an old and untenanted tomb rapidly crumbling into dust, and a plainly constructed new tomb, may appear to be an *exorbitant* price; but it cannot be so viewed by true-hearted Americans, when they take into consideration the infinite number of purely patriotic reminiscences that must forever be associated with those premises, doubly rendered priceless by containing the remains of him of whom it has been said, "When his fame first broke upon the world, it spread at once over the whole world, by the common consent of mankind—by the universal sentiment, he was placed at the head of the human species; above all envy, because above all emulation; for no one then pretended, or has pretended to be—at least who has been allowed to be—the co-rival of Washington in fame. When the Great Frederick of Prussia sent his portrait to Washington with this inscription upon it, '*from the oldest general in Europe to the greatest general in the world*,' he did but echo the sentiment of all the chivalry of Europe. Nor was that sentiment confined to Europe, nor to the bounds of civilization, for the Arab of the desert talked of Washington in his tent; his name wandered with the wandering Scythian, and was cherished by him as a household word in all

his migrations. No clime was so barbarous as to be a stranger to the name; but everywhere and by all men that name was placed at the same point of elevation, and above compeer. As it was in the beginning, so is it now: of the future we cannot speak with certainty. Some future age in the endless revolutions of time *may* produce another Washington; but the great probability is, that he is destined to remain forever, as he now is, the Phoenix of the human kind. What a possession to his country is such a fame! To all his countrymen it gives, and forever will give, a passport to respect wherever they go, to whatever part of the globe, for his country is in every other identified with that fame. What, then, is incumbent upon us his countrymen? Why, to be such a people as shall be worthy of such a fame; a people of whom it shall be said, '*no wonder such a people have produced such a man as Washington.*'" The late Hon. Asher Robbins, U. S. Senator from Rhode Island, author of the foregoing remarks, after having thus spoken at a festival in honor of Washington's birthday, proposed the following patriotic sentiment: "THE MEMORY OF WASHINGTON—*May his countrymen prove themselves a people worthy of his fame.*"

The money now in the United States treasury, which, but for the unrequited services of Washington throughout the war that achieved American independence, would be in the hands of his descendants, is vastly more than equal to the sum named, for which this nation may become possessed of the grounds, mansion, and the tomb wherein rest his mortal remains. That sum, added to the annual expense (probably near if not quite \$2,000 per year) the *Washington family* have submitted to for nearly half a century, in entertaining all persons generally, but members of Congress and other agents of the sovereign people of these United States in particular, shows the dollar and cent indebtedness of Americans to Washington to be infinitely more than \$100,000. It is hoped this subject will be taken in hand by the whole American people, without distinction of sect or party; and that through the medium of memorials addressed to the coming Congress, they will manifest their unanimous wish and desire to see Mount Vernon forthwith purchased on their own account, and thus effectually prevent the possible contingency of its ever being sold, perchance under the hammer of the auctioneer to the highest bidder, who might be an agent of some Turk or other foreigner, who would then have the power to exact *tribute* from or levy a *tax* in the shape of admission *fees* on all persons visiting those *consecrated grounds*, revered and beloved by every *friend of liberty* throughout the *world*.



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